

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 08 TEL AVIV 000146

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Abbas's Election

Key stories in the media:

All media highlighted the large majority (an expected 66-70 percent) received by Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) in the PA election on Sunday. The turnout was high -- around 70 percent. However, Jerusalem Post reported that "in a stunning vote of no confidence in the corruption-ridden PA," the vast majority of Arab residents of East Jerusalem stayed away from city polling stations. The media reported that Abbas declared victory in Ramallah, saying: "We offer this victory to the soul of the brother martyr Yasser Arafat and to all Palestinians." Abbas was further quoted as saying that the PA's task will be to establish a state with Jerusalem as its capital, and that a "big jihad" would follow the "small jihad," the latter remark sparking media speculation regarding the course the new Palestinian leadership would take. The media say that PM Sharon will invite Abbas for talks -- according to Yediot, perhaps as soon as next week. Like other major media, Jerusalem Post quoted senior GOI officials as saying Sunday that Israel will ask Abbas to immediately renew security coordination and deploy PA security personnel at Gaza locations used to fire mortar shells and Qassam rockets. Jerusalem Post quoted those sources as saying that if these steps are taken, Israel will respond in kind with steps of its own. Ha'aretz notes that the IDF reported few Palestinian complaints about voting hitches on Sunday. On Sunday, Yediot quoted sources in Ramallah as saying that Israel has eased Marwan Barghouti's conditions of detention so that he can help Abbas. Jerusalem Post cited Minister of Jerusalem and Diaspora Affairs Natan Sharansky as saying that the PA election was not "truly free."

Israel Radio reported that President Bush welcomed Abbas's election and pledged to help the Palestinian people, while calling on Israel to "improve the humanitarian and economic situation" in the Palestinian areas, and on the Arab states to resume their aid to the Palestinians. Based on Reuters, Ha'aretz cited Secretary of State Colin Powell's promise of increased

SIPDIS
aid to the Palestinians. The media printed pictures of former U.S. president Jimmy Carter and Sen. John Kerry during Election Day.

All media reported that an IDF officer was killed at the Sheba farms on Sunday when the jeep he was riding in hit an explosive charge laid by Hizbullah. Hizbullah later fired at IDF outposts in the area, to which the army responded with artillery fire and aerial strikes. A French UNTSO officer was killed in the crossfire. Israel Radio reported that Israel accuses Syria of trying to undermine Abbas's leadership by way of Hizbullah. On Sunday, all media reported that a soldier was killed, three other soldiers and a civilian were wounded in an ambush Friday south of Nablus. Leading media reported that an alert for a terrorist on the prowl paralyzed Israel's central region last night.

Leading media reported that the Yahad party pledged to abstain at today's Knesset vote endorsing the new government if the Likud "rebels" vote against it. On Friday, Jerusalem Post mentioned Ambassador Kurtzer's longstanding close association with Labor Party MK Ophir Pines-Paz, who will become interior minister in

the new government.

Leading media reported that O/C Central Command Moshe Kaplinski will dismiss six reserve officers who declined to disavow a letter they signed, in which they stated they would refuse orders to evacuate settlements. The army is considering taking disciplinary action against the 28 other signatories. The decision came after a day of talks between the sides Sunday, during which no agreement was reached. Ha'aretz reported that Sunday in Tel Aviv, at an emergency conference of "rabbis against the transfer of Jews," leading rabbis from the Religious Zionist and ultra-Orthodox communities joined calls to refuse to serve and "severe halakhic [Jewish law-based] prohibitions" against giving up territory. The group took United Torah Judaism (UTJ) to task for the first time for joining the government coalition, although it was careful not to mention the name of Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, UTJ's spiritual mentor who approved the move.

On Sunday, Yediot reported on the defense establishment's decision to dig a ditch along the Philadelphia route in a few weeks. The purpose of the ditch is to prevent the digging of tunnels under the route.

Israel Radio reported that in a ceremony held at the Adath Israel Synagogue in New York on Sunday, representatives of the countries hardest-hit by the tsunami disaster thanked Israel and the American Jewish

SIPDIS
community for their aid. On Sunday, Ha'aretz reported that 200 Jewish and Muslim leaders from all over the world united against religious extremism at the "Rabbis and Imams For Peace" conference, which was held in Brussels last week under the sponsorship of the organization Hommes de Parole ("Men of Their Word").

Maariv (Amir Rappaport) reported that China is threatening to withdraw important Beijing Olympics-related contracts from Israel, if it does not get back the Harpy drones that were sent here for repair. The newspaper, which says that the affair could cost Israel up to USD 1 billion, recalls that the U.S. is pressuring Israel not to return the UAVs to China.

Citing Reuters, Ha'aretz reported on Sunday that the World Jewish Congress announced it was about to call on NATO to grant Israel associate membership in the alliance to bolster Israel's security and to smooth relations between Europe and the Middle East.

Ha'aretz and Yediot cited Interior Ministry statistics as saying that the number of people living in settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip increased by 6 percent last year, reaching 250,179 in 2004. 830 people joined the Gaza Strip's Katif Bloc in 2004.

Yediot reported that FM Silvan Shalom is considering naming as his spokesman Yehoshua Mor-Yosef, the political secretary and spokesman of the Yesha Council of Jewish Settlements in the Territories.

All media (lead stories in Yediot and Maariv) reported that on Sunday, Stanley Fischer, the vice chairman of Citigroup, accepted PM Sharon and Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's offer to serve as the next governor of the Bank of Israel. To take up the position, Fischer will have to immigrate to Israel and relinquish his American citizenship. Yediot bannered the concern expressed by leaders of Israel's economy over the appointment: "Why Was an American Governor Preferred?"

Ha'aretz cited a survey conducted by the Jewish National Fund (JNF), according to which more than 70 percent of Israel's Jews object to allocating JNF-owned lands to Arabs.

Abbas's Election:

Summary:

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar opined in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "If Abu Mazen succeeds where his predecessor Yasser Arafat failed and lowers the heat, Israel will have to divest itself of the respectable title 'the only democracy in the Middle East.' Then the occupation will be exposed in its full nakedness."

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach editorialized in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Abu Mazen is the democratically elected president who enjoys international legitimacy, and he will not be easily dismissed with the wave of an Israeli hand." Regional correspondent Ronni Shaked wrote in Yediot Aharonot: "It became apparent that when the Palestinians put the Kalashnikov aside, they are also capable of demonstrating different behavior.... Sunday's elections are definitely a step in the right direction."

Security and intelligence affairs commentator Amit Cohen wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "In spite of the difficulties that lie ahead, Israel ought to view these elections as a positive, encouraging step."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "It would not be not be surprising if Abbas attempted to continue the path of his on-and-off mentor, Arafat."

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized: "Abu Mazen comes across as a moderate.... But his worldview is no different from Arafat's: namely, action should be taken to promote the destruction of the State of Israel."

Correspondent Gregory Ger (Kulchinsky) wrote in conservative Russian-language Vesty: "Abu Mazen is most likely to be elected. However, according to his statements in the past several days, the situation in the region will not change essentially."

Yasser Abed Rabbo, the Palestinian co-initiator of the Geneva Accord, wrote in Yediot Aharonot: "We need to see on the horizon the permanent solution, which is based on the principle of two states for two peoples based on the 1967 borders. It is precisely at this point that the importance of the Geneva initiative is growing."

Block Quotes:

I. "Israel's Excuses Are Running Out"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar opined in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (January 10): "If Abu Mazen succeeds where his predecessor Yasser Arafat failed and lowers the heat, Israel will have to divest itself of the respectable title 'the only democracy in the Middle East.' Then the occupation will be exposed in its full nakedness.... The control by Abu Mazen's government of the street in Gaza and a switch to nonviolent struggle against the occupation in the West Bank will leave Israel stripped of excuses to hold onto the Jewish settlements in the territories, never mind their expansion. The separation fence, another unilateral initiative on Israel's part -- like the disengagement plan -- could bring it even closer to the June 4, 1967 borders."

II. "A New Beginning"

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach editorialized in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (January 10): "As of this morning Mahmoud Abbas is the president of Palestine. His subjects, most of whom face only poverty, occupation and corruption, may not have seen a great reason for celebration and did not go out, en masse, to the polling stations, but Abu Mazen is the democratically elected president who enjoys international legitimacy, and he will not be easily dismissed with the wave of an Israeli hand. As of this morning it will be more difficult for Abu Mazen and Israel to play the game of 'them first,' that they were so busy with these past few months. There will be no justification for either side continuing to duck its responsibilities, there will no longer be anyone else on whom to pin the blame for failure. As of this morning, the Palestinian gain is not necessarily our loss, and vice versa."

III. "On the Way to Change"

Regional correspondent Ronni Shaked wrote in Yediot Aharonot (January 10): "It became apparent that when the Palestinians put the Kalashnikov aside, they are also capable of demonstrating different behavior. The problem is that many of them are not yet ready to hold negotiations that are not under the shadow of terror. What is more severe is that many terrorist groups, not only Hamas and Islamic Jihad, are unwilling to accept the authority of the leadership, even if it is the people's democratic choice. Therefore, it is doubtful whether the democratic display we witnessed on Sunday will continue. The Palestinians of Rafah, the Jenin refugee camp or Hebron have not yet internalized

democratic values, as opposed to the yuppies of Ramallah and the intellectuals of Bir Zeit.... Nevertheless, Sunday's elections are definitely a step in the right direction.... As of today, Abu Mazen is no longer on the campaign trail, and cannot sell his people unsubstantiated slogans and declarations. Abu Mazen will have to form a strong new government, appoint an interior minister with powers and remove the Tunis people from his way, those who still hold Arafatist views. Abu Mazen says that he is aware of the problems and difficulties, and is ready for the challenges, but he hopes that Israel will not turn its back on him as it did when he served as prime minister. It takes two for this tango. In order to meet his goals, Abu Mazen needs time. The question is whether Israel will be willing to give him the necessary time to get organized and prove that he is indeed making efforts to bring about calm."

IV. "Arab Countries Could Learn From Them"

Security and intelligence affairs commentator Amit Cohen wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (January 10): "The Palestinian public, and likewise its candidates for president, demonstrated a genuine desire for change, a desire to turn over a new leaf, to remove the debris of the past. Even if the atmosphere at the elections was not inspired, there was a feeling that the democracy was genuine. In that sense the Palestinians are the first of the Arab nations to succeed in holding an organized and orderly election campaign. But in spite of the success of the election campaign, they have a long way to go before they can call themselves a democracy. In Israel the talk is mostly about reform of the Palestinian security agencies, but the Palestinian Authority is in dire need of a massive overhaul of all its institutions, including those not directly related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. So before the new 'Rais' -- Abu Mazen -- tries to improve his relations with Israel, he has to set his own house in order.... In spite of the difficulties that lie ahead, Israel ought to view these elections as a positive, encouraging step, not only because Abu Mazen, the preferred candidate of Washington and Jerusalem was elected, but also because the Palestinian people showed Sunday that it wants a democratic regime subject to public scrutiny and responsive to public opinion. Even though this process is not complete, everything should be done to help it on its way."

IV. "How to Help Abbas"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (January 10): "Israel and the region, not to mention the Palestinians themselves, have a great interest in the success of their democracy.... Experience, however, indicates that it is not the margin of victory that will be determinative, but the expectations of the international community and its willingness to enforce them. Abbas, after all, has taken contradictory positions.... In this context, it would not be surprising if Abbas attempted to continue the path of his on-and-off mentor, Arafat, who would sometimes claim to be against violence, never lift a finger to stop it and always claim that he was too weak to take steps against terrorism without further Western support. Rare is the leader who will take painful steps when he can avoid them. The path of least resistance is to make a show of effort, claim weakness and sit back and wait for the flurry of calls to 'support Abu Mazen' to bear fruit. This time, if the international community really cares about ending terror and the success of the Palestinian democratic project, it must behave differently. Financial support for the new-old Palestinian leader must be tightly linked both to ending terrorism and violence and to democratic reforms. Our own government, it should go without saying, should not undermine such linkage. Though we can always hope it will be otherwise, it would hardly be a surprise if one of those opposing the tight linkage of aid to performance is our own incoming vice prime minister, Shimon Peres."

VI. "Now the Gestures"

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized (January 10): "The guileful Abu Mazen has already drawn up a list of demands from the Israeli government the goal of which, so he will say, is to help him gain control over the Palestinian street. All of his demands will receive the support of the Europeans, particularly Britain, and, as far as we know, Abu Mazen will find an attentive ear in the U.S. State Department and the White House. Abu Mazen comes across as a moderate and his statements against violent terrorism and the

Intifada have served him well in the West. But his worldview is no different from Arafat's: namely, action should be taken to promote the destruction of the State of Israel. Abu Mazen wants to make as substantial territorial gains as possible by means of soft statements in support of dialogue and against violence, and when he obtains most of his demands with the help of the superpowers' pressure, he will turn to the use of weapons and warfare.... Abu Mazen is taking a new approach, and Israel now is going to pay a dear price for Abu Mazen's guile. Under the cover of the relative quiet and the smiles, a military power with unparalleled ability to jeopardize Israel will be built. One of the chief proponents of this approach is Egypt. The President of Egypt, who ignores the arms smuggling operations by the terror organizations from his country, considers Abu Mazen to be an ally with whom he can steal horses. Ariel Sharon, the strategist and military genius, has gone blind in many fields, and we can only hope that we do not discover the heavy price that we are going to have to pay too late."

VII. "Palestinians to Elect Their 'Rais'"

Correspondent Gregory Ger (Kulchinsky) wrote in conservative Russian-language Vesty (January 9): "The Palestinians are electing a new 'Rais'... Abu Mazen is most likely to be elected. However, according to his statements in the past several days, the situation in the region will not change essentially. ... Abu Mazen is not planning to change his predecessor's human resources politics seriously. The discontinuation of the 'politics of terror' also raises serious doubts among the experts. Sources in the Prime Minister's Office assume that Sharon's meeting with Abu Mazen (should Abu Mazen be elected) would take place a couple of days after the elections. ... First of all Prime Minister Sharon would demand that PA Chairman [act] to stop mortar and rocket fire [on Israeli towns]".

VIII. "Israel's Choice"

Yasser Abed Rabbo, the Palestinian co-initiator of the Geneva Accord, wrote in Yediot Aharonot (January 9): "The incipient new political reality in Israel and the Palestinian Authority have led the two parties to the threshold of a great opportunity. They have both grown weary of the ongoing conflict, and the time has come to bring about its end. People in the Palestinian leadership can already begin to feel the change. We began to promote reforms, we openly declared our opposition to violence and many democratic countries are envious of our election process. However, to complete the initiatives we have begun, we need a genuine Israeli partner and a stable and credible political process.... An Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip is certainly a positive step, but the Palestinians still do not know what will happen after disengagement. Does 'Gaza first' also mean 'Gaza last,' as the Prime Minister's aide, Dov Weisglass, said? Will the northern part of the West Bank turn into an isolated territory? It is important to underscore that the Israeli government will have no Palestinian partner for forcing a solution that does not take into account the vital needs and interests of the Palestinian people. By the same token it is clear that for a solution to be viable it has to be accepted by the Israeli public. For us to become Israel's partners in the disengagement plan as well, we need to envision an end to construction in the settlements and an end to the construction of the separation wall in the West Bank. More importantly, we need to see on the horizon the permanent solution, which is based on the principle of two states for two peoples based on the 1967 borders. It is precisely at this point that the importance of the Geneva initiative is growing."

KURTZER